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“Created and Creating”

Proverbs 8:1-4; 22-31

John 16:12-15

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Listen as Wisdom calls out!

*Hear as understanding raises her voice!
On the hilltop along the road,
she takes her stand at the crossroads.
By the gates at the entrance to the town,
on the road leading in, she cries aloud,
“I call to you, to all of you!
I raise my voice to all people.*

*“The Lord formed me from the beginning,
before he created anything else.
I was appointed in ages past,
at the very first, before the earth began.
I was born before the oceans were created,
before the springs bubbled forth their waters.
Before the mountains were formed,
before the hills, I was born—
before he had made the earth and fields
and the first handfuls of soil.
I was there when he established the heavens,
when he drew the horizon on the oceans.
I was there when he set the clouds above,
when he established springs deep in the earth.
I was there when he set the limits of the seas,
so they would not spread beyond their boundaries.
And when he marked off the earth’s foundations,
I was the architect at his side.
I was his constant delight,
rejoicing always in his presence.*

*And how happy I was with the world he created;
how I rejoiced with the human family!"*

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

"There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all truth. The Spirit will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. The Spirit will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me.

All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever the Spirit receives from me.'"

John 16:12-15

At the 2019 Tony's, when Rachel Chavkin won best direction of a musical for her work on *Hadestown*, she was the only woman nominated in the category, and she was the only woman directing a musical on Broadway during that season. She accepted her award and said, "There are so many women who are ready to go. There are so many artists of color who are ready to go. And we need to see that racial diversity and gender diversity reflected in our critical establishment too. This is not a pipeline issue. It is a failure of imagination by a field whose job is to imagine the way the world could be."

This failure of imagination is dangerous. It plagues our work, our social structures, our government, and everything we pass on to children. I remember my second-grade teacher telling me I was wrong when I chose

to use some fun colors to color-in a giraffe. It's silly, but really, how many times are we repeatedly conditioned as children by being told, "Well that's just not how it works"? Or we internalize what we sense, from all the people around us, that we're limited to just what's visible in front of us. We're conditioned to see limitations, rules, our own shortcomings as our guides, and we quickly take the brokenness that surrounds us as just part of life.

Maybe the sin that causes humanity's fall from God's paradise is actually a diminishing imagination, that kind of stagnation of creative power. The commandment God gives in the creation myths, after all, is a command to be fruitful and multiply. It's a command to creativity. It's a command to limitlessness. To not sell anything short. To name beauty and goodness, and to call more beauty and goodness forth. To imagine all that could be and to dare in that direction.

When our imaginations have been too small, or we've felt trapped or lost, creative expression saves our lives. In those moments, like a deep response to the call of our own spirits, we instinctively are drawn to create. We knit, paint, sit at the piano for hours, speaking our soul, healing ourselves, and out of those moments of limitlessness we're brought back to our expansive selves, and we find our voice again.

Josh Rockett works at a juvenile detention center in Illinois. He talks about how the system strips the young people of their souls. They are identified by their inmate number, and they're controlled—completely dehumanized by a system that is only concerned with perfectly made beds, slamming metal doors and enough toilet paper. He

says, “Detention is a factory that makes itself feel good.” But he witnesses how the kids refuse to let the factory steal their identity, and this subversion shows up most in the art room. Josh is their art teacher, and he provides blank canvases, asking them to show what hope means to them. He offers all the supplies they need and helps them think up ideas for projects. They produce pictures of family, cars and money, dreams of being athletes and parents. They learn to knit, and they tend a garden. In their first season, they produced 200 pounds of vegetables. They make fresh salsa, and they donate produce to a local food pantry. Josh says that all of that “creation united what the detention center tried to separate: soul and body. To be free on the inside and free on the outside are the same. Resurrection overcomes false dichotomies of self and the combative ‘us vs. them’ culture that incarceration perpetuates. The act of creation,” he continues, “ushers in the wholeness of life. It makes growing a garden, painting a picture, picking a tomato and knitting a scarf sacred.”

God made us creative people. Creative does not just mean capital-A artistic. Instead, it’s a posture, a mindset, finding solutions or connections where there weren’t obvious links before. Creativity is what puts a farm on top of a roof in DUMBO and fills beds with produce at an elementary school. Creativity is what turns an abandoned waterfront into public parks and begins a community fridge. Creativity is what listens deeply and finds ways to engage a community’s giftedness. It answers “Yes,” when everything else says, “No.” We are called to participate with God in bringing life from death, beauty from chaos and expansiveness from limitations. Our creative power is a charge to renew the world, to recreate the world, and be

whole as a whole community.

The Bible is full of this call from God. The Hebrew word RUACH is most of the time translated as Spirit. The capital S kind of Holy Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit doesn't actually show up as a proper name until Jesus starts talking about sending an Advocate, a paraclete, in the New Testament. The word that we can understand as Holy Spirit shows up 389 times in the Hebrew Bible. RUACH is a feminine noun understood as an invisible force, and in the Old Testament, it comes out in English as "mind," "breath," "anger," "wind," "blast," "spirit" and "courage." In Proverbs, Woman Wisdom speaks as a separate creative force in the world, but all still part of God. Wisdom was at creation with God. And we know, at least from the first chapter of John, that the Christ was also present in the beginning, so we have all persons of the Trinity acting together at the creation of time. In Genesis, RUACH hovers over the waters and fills everything with the breath of life. And we know God is a collaboration here because God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

This same Spirit is how Noah is to determine who he should bring on the arc: "two and two of all flesh in which there is the breath of life." And the RUACH wind blows over the earth to dry the flood. The Spirit shows up in dreams of powerful tyrants—Pharaoh and King Nebuchadnezzar—and troubles them. She divides the waters of the sea for the Israelites to cross on dry ground and compels them to bear each other's burdens in the wilderness. The Spirit is in Hannah in the form of sorrow, as she prays to God for a child. RUACH is in the valley of the dry bones, calling them back to life. She is the wind God sends to trouble the

sea when Jonah runs. She shows up in call narratives, fills people, is poured out on people and gives gifts of prophecy. Joel 2:28 says, “I will pour out my RUACH on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your elders shall dream dreams, and your young people shall see visions. Even on the slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”

This pouring out of the spirit always comes hand-in-hand with a call to justice. We are called to creativity not just to make beautiful, soul-lifting art, but to imagine and enact God’s paradise for our world—where the poor inhabit the kingdom of God, the oppressed inherit great reward, the hungry are filled and the merciful are shown mercy. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the charge to creativity is repeatedly about release for the captives, care for the orphan, widow and foreigner, and recovery of sight for the blind. That vision of justice is the heart of God and embodied in Jesus, and God beckons each of us into that creative task with them.

Here, in John, Jesus is speaking to his friends on the night of his arrest. He tells them everything he can, as much as he can. And finally, he notices out loud that it’s maybe all too much, and maybe it doesn’t make much sense right now. “But don’t worry,” he tells his disciples. “The Spirit’s going to be with you, and she’ll help you understand.” Jesus says some stuff about the Spirit speaking and declaring what is to come. “She will tell you about the future. She will bring me glory by telling you whatever she receives from me.”

Speaking is an important God-act. In Genesis, God speaks things existence. “Let there be light,” God says. So maybe what Jesus is talking about here, maybe the work of the Spirit is not exactly to fill our heads with words, but to convict us toward bringing beauty, truth and goodness

forth from chaos, to bring understanding, yes, of course, to call us to wake up, but all through creativity.

The Spirit is not just the breath of life that fills our lungs. This inspired wind, RUACH, is God's palpable energy alive in creation, filling each of us up with life, connecting all of us to the whole created world, and calling us to creativity, without boundaries.

No matter how risky or vulnerable creativity is, with every breath we breathe, we still fill our lungs with God's limitlessness.

Making good news tangible requires that limitlessness. Until we can imagine a world where hunger, racism, poverty, sexism, homophobia and violence don't exist, then we won't ever be reaching, working or creating big enough. We can expand our imagining by listening to the stories of those who don't share our social location, by putting ourselves in places that demand we sit with our discomfort, by preferencing voices that haven't been traditionally privileged. How can we offer a wider embrace? How are we unapologetically proclaiming the value and beauty of each of our siblings? How are we enacting liberation for all of creation? How are we breaking through barriers and creating a way where there wasn't before? How are we ushering in expansiveness?

Majora Carter grew up in the South Bronx, an area that handles more than 40% of the city's commercial waste, sewage treatment plants, power plants and has one of the lowest ratios of parks to people in the city. It's an area that was redlined by the banks, and in 1955, Robert Moses' highway project cut through the neighborhood, displacing 600,000 people. One in four children in the South Bronx has asthma, and their asthma hospitalization rate is seven times higher than the national average.

Twenty-five percent of the neighborhood is unemployed, and 50% of residents live at or below the poverty line. Majora learned from an early age that nothing good comes from her neighborhood.

The neighborhood is still feeling the effects of antiquated and oppressive zoning, and in the early 2000s, Majora and her community realized that the people doing the “planning” were never going to have their best interests in mind. So they decided to do some planning of their own. It began by turning an abandoned waterfront property into a park. Hunts Point Riverside Park became the first waterfront park in the South Bronx in more than 60 years. And the power and imagination of the community grew from there. Majora wrote a \$1.2 million federal transportation grant to construct a greenway, with designated bike paths. They began a project called the Bronx Environmental Stewardship Training, that provides job training in ecological restoration so that folks in their community can have the skills needed to compete for the jobs that these park projects created. They recognized how underutilized the Sheridan Expressway actually is, so the community created an alternative transportation plan that allowed for the removal of the highway. The area the highway covered was turned into affordable housing and miles of parks. The community recreated their neighborhood. Dreaming about what could be possible on the 28 acres the highway occupied led to an investment in a community that had been systemically disinvested for decades.

No matter how we imagine new life for our own selves, for our neighborhoods and siblings, for our governing systems, the Spirit is moving through us and compelling us to never stop creating. As children of a creative God, our imaginations should be infinitely big. We are the ones

saying “yes,” when everything else says “no.” Spirit-filled means we make connections and find solutions and chase after dreams that don’t make earthly sense. As children of a creative God, we too don’t ever stop being inspired by the one who inspires life itself. We are inspired so much so that we cannot not get to work, releasing the captives, caring for the orphan, widow and foreigner, and opening up each other’s eyes.

Come, creative wind, may we be a part of what you are doing. Lead us into the good news and promise of unlimited creation.

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